DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 732 CS 214 027

AUTHOR Peirce, Kate
TITLE Socialization of Teenage Girls through Teen-Magazine Fiction: The Making of a New Woman or an Old Lady?
PUB DATE Aug 93
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (76th, Kansas City, MO, August 11-14, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; *Females; Identification (Psychology); *Mass Media Effects; Media Research; *Periodicals; Secondary Education; *Sex Stereotypes; Short Stories; *Socialization
IDENTIFIERS Journalism Research; Male Female Relationship

ABSTRACT

Noting that magazines, as part of the broader category 'media,' are a powerful socialization force, a study investigated the socialization messages in teen magazines by examining their short stories for stereotypical portrayals. All fiction stories were analyzed for the years 1987-1991 in "Seventeen" and "Teen" magazines. The total number of stories was 104. Two hypotheses were tested: (1) teen-magazine fiction portrays teen protagonists as dependent rather than independent; and (2) teen magazine fiction segregates occupations stereotypically by gender. Previous studies have shown that high school students still stereotype occupations and career choices. Both hypotheses were supported. Through the stories, a teenage girl learns that male-female relationships are more important than just about anything else; that she is not supposed to act or be agressive or solve problems (others will do that for her); and that there really are male and female professions. (One table of data is included, and 25 references are attached.) (NH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 361 732

Socialization of teenage girls through teen-magazine fiction: The making of a new woman or an old lady?

By

Kate Peirce
Associate Professor of Journalism
Southwest Texas State University
Journalism Department
San Marcos, TX 78666

(512) 245-2656

CS214027

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

K. Peirce

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

A new woman, according to *New Woman* magazine, is a woman who is neither defined by her relationship to a man nor dependent on or inferior to men. She is concerned more with brains than with beauty and is as good in the boardroom or courtroom as she is in the kitchen. She is free to choose whatever combination of marriage, children and career she wants and doesn't feel obligated to follow the traditional female path of homemaker and child-raiser.

The new woman is someone who has escaped or overcome the socialization that limits her to stereotypically feminine roles, attributes and behaviors. Such socialization begins from the moment a girl is born, wrapped in a pink blanket and given dolls to play with. It continues at school, with textbooks depicting boys as good at math and girls bewildered by it (Schau & Scott, 1984) and with teachers who call on boys more often than girls (Sadker & Sadker, 1988) and reward boys for academic behavior and girls for nonacademic behavior (Fagot, 1984).

By adolescence, the traditionally socialized young woman will believe that, in addition to math, boys are good at athletics and girls are not and that being pretty and popular and having a boyfriend are more important than academics (Romer, 1979, pp. 50, 66-67). She will believe that the definition of feminine success is being attractive to men, attaining a desirable social status and marrying the right man (Weitzman, 1979, p.46). Such girls will *not* grow up to be new women.

While the media tend to reinforce traditional roles through their portrayals of women (see, for example, Busby, 1985, Signorielli, 1989 and Butler & Paisley, 1980), alternatives exist. In the magazine field, the new woman is the focus of such nontraditional and relatively new magazines as *Working Woman, Ms* and *Savvy Woman* as well as *New Woman*. These magazines recognize women's roles outside the home and offer women alternatives to the older, more traditional magazines, such as *McCall's* and *Good*

Housekeeping, whose target audience is the homemaker. Even some of the older magazines have begun to broaden their horizons a little by showing more women working outside the home, though their work tends to be in traditionally female occupations (Ruggiero & Weston, 1985).

All is not perfect in the world of magazines, however. While the nonfiction in women's magazines has given women's magazines a slightly more feminist slant — primarily through the birth of new magazines — the fiction in women's magazines has remained decidedly traditional. This is in part because of the new magazines mentioned above only *Ms* carries fiction; the majority of fiction is found in the traditional magazines.

Studies of women's magazine fiction have found women portrayed as passive, insecure, vulnerable and naive (Friedan, 1963) and in control of their fate only a quarter of the time (Lugenbeel, 1974). In fiction from 1940-1970 women worked only if they had to or because they wanted to find a husband, giving up their low-status jobs as soon as they got married (Franzwa, 1974). The heroine in magazine fiction in 1957 and 1967 was an attractive married woman 26-35 years old whose occupation was housekeeping and whose goals were love-oriented (Bailey, 1969).

More recent studies suggest that magazines haven't changed much over the years. Flora (1979) and Schomberger (1989) both looked at fiction in magazines in the early to mid-seventies. Flora analyzed middle class (in *Redbook* and *Cosmopolitan*) and working class (in *True Story* and *Modern Romances*) fiction in 1970 and 1975. She found middle class women less likely and working class women more likely in 1975 to be valued for dependence and ineffectuality. She suggests that this indicates a definite shift in middle-class fiction away from the passive female image and stress on traditional roles. Schomberger's analysis of the fiction in *Redbook*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Ms* for 1972-73 agrees with Flora's analysis of 1970; however, she

also analyzed the fiction for 1982-83 and did *not* find any decrease in dependence for women. She concluded that women are still, or once again, defined in terms of men and children and that the woman's place is still in the home (p.175). Only five stories in the 1970s focused on any other role for women. Of those five, three of the heroines were teachers and one was a secretary. She did not find any stories in the 1980s that focused on careers. Roberts (1980), analyzing fiction in *Ladies' Home Journal* from 1960-62 and 1974-76, found that it remained consistently traditional.

Such are the socialization messages in popular women's magazines. Magazines, as part of the broader category 'media', are a powerful socialization force. The media reflect and shape society, communicating messages about gender roles that are extremely influential, especially for young people who are still learning about the world (Basow, 1986, p. 136).

Largely overlooked in discussions of magazines as socialization forces are teen magazines and the messages they send to teenage girls, who have not yet made most of their life decisions. With their circulations surpassing a million each, these magazines must not be discounted in the socialization process. What *are* they telling young women about women's lives?

According to McRobbie's (1982) qualitative study in the mid-1970s of a British teen magazine called *Jackie*, a teenage girl's only concerns are romance problems, fashion, beauty and pop stars. *Seventeen*, an American teen magazine, says much the same thing: articles on fashion, beauty, food and decorating made up about 60% of each issue and relationships with boys another 6-7% for the years 1961, 1972 and 1985. While the percentage of feminist content was higher in 1972 than in 1961, it was slightly *less* in 1985 than in 1961 (Peirce, 1990). Thus, the teenage girl learns that her job is to look good, find a boyfriend and take care of home and hearth. The nonfiction editorial copy is *not* teaching young girls to become new

women.

This study was designed to find out more about the socialization messages in teen magazines by examining the short stories for stereotypical portrayals. The findings of previous research suggest two hypotheses. First, teen-magazine fiction portrays teen protagonists as dependent rather than independent. Second, teen-magazine fiction segregates occupations stereotypically by gender.

Method

Because the purpose of this study was to examine current portrayals in teen magazines, the most recent five-year period at the time of analysis was chosen for study. All fiction stories were analyzed for the years 1987-1991 in *Seventeen* and *Teen,* large-circulation (more than 1 million) national teen magazines. (*Sassy* does not contain fiction and *YM* quit publishing fiction in the mid-'80s so these two teen magazines were not included in the analysis.) Not every issue of every magazine included fiction, so the total number of stories was 104.

Dependence and occupational status were chosen for analysis because of their prominence in women's-magazine research and because of their importance in gender-role socialization.

Two variables were used to measure the concept dependence. Flora (1979) defined dependence as the heroine depending on others for identity or survival, so the concept was first measured by asking if the heroine depended on someone else to solve the problem or solved the problem herself. Categories for the variable problem solving were "main character" and "other."

Having a boyfriend and marrying the right man are important for the traditional woman for both identity and survival, and teenage girls often become extremely dependent on their boyfriends (Romer, p. 56). Therefore, the concept was also measured by seeing how many

of the conflicts had to do with boys — getting a boyfriend, losing one or not having one. The categories for the conflict variable were "boyfriend," "family," "friend" and "other."

Occupational status was measured by noting whether occupations mentioned in the stories were stereotypical, nonstereotypical or neutral.

The stories were read independently by three pairs of coders who determined whom the conflict was with and who solved it. They also listed all occupations mentioned and the gender of the character associated with the occupation. Intercoder reliabilities were .85, .89 and .93 for the three pairs. A third coder was used to resolve discrepancies. Two undergraduate journalism classes (30 students) were given a list of the occupations mentioned and asked to rate them as typically feminine, typically masculine or neutral. The highest percentage was used to assign a final rating to each occupation. The ratings were then compared with the gender of the character.

Results

Both hypotheses were supported. In 62% of the stories, the main character depended on someone else to solve the problem (chi square = 6.51, df = 1, $p < .05$). A typical scenario is the case of one heroine who develops a crush on a young symphony conductor who moves in next door. The two become friends but any question of romance is answered by the conductor's taking a job in Berlin. The story ends with the girl wishing she could overcome her obsession but not having done so. Another example is the case of the girl whose grandmother moves out of her house and into a trailer, leading the girl to think she doesn't want her to visit anymore. Grandma takes command of the situation and invites the girl to visit her, bakes her cookies and shows her the guest bedroom. In other stories as well, it

is someone else who shows the girl the error of her thinking and not the heroine herself who solves her problems.

In a significant number of stories (43%), the conflict had something to do with boys (chi square = 23.01, df = 3, $p < .001$). This category is followed by family (27%), other (17%) and friends (13%). One particularly disturbing example of the male/female theme is a story in *Seventeen* in which the heroine, a high school sophomore, suddenly finds herself with a boyfriend. "Now I was someone with a future... Until now I'd been a kid, stumbling along... A few weeks ago I'd been a zero and now I had a boyfriend!" It turns out that the boy is actually involved with someone else. "Now I didn't have a boyfriend anymore, an Ivy-League, advanced-math, possible husband-in-a-big-modern-house boyfriend." But it's all right — there's another boy waiting in the wings, and she and the second boy head happily out into the night.

Table 1 lists the occupations mentioned in the stories, their student ratings and the character's gender. Of the 44 occupations listed, 10 were judged to be neutral. Of the ones not rated neutral, the gender of the character was the same as the rating except for two, psychiatrist and government worker. Both were rated masculine and while there was a male character in both occupations, there was also a female. The rest were stereotypical: The women were the nurses, clerical workers, social workers and secretaries, and the men were the doctors, lawyers, judges and bankers. It should be noted that while 'business owner' is listed once, there were several businesses mentioned in the stories — service station, stable, hotel, store, restaurant, real estate company and bookstand — and all were owned by men. Women were the sales clerks, usually in women-oriented stores such as dress shops and gift shops, as well as the clerical workers and secretaries. 'Teacher' is also listed once, although there were several teachers of both genders in the stories. The subjects they taught were not often specified, but the English

teachers were always women (except for the chair of an English department at a community college) and the trigonometry teacher was a man.

There was little difference between *'Teen* and ***Seventeen*** in stereotyping occupations but there was a difference in the number of occupations assigned each gender. While ***Seventeen*** didn't play favorites, *'Teen* gave almost twice as many occupations to men.

TABLE I ABOUT HERE

Discussion

The messages in teen-magazine fiction are not unlike those in women's-magazine fiction and do not contradict those in teen-magazine nonfiction. Through the stories, a teenage girl learns that male-female relationships are more important than just about anything, that she isn't supposed to act or be aggressive or solve problems — others will do that for her — and that there really are male and female professions.

More important than the themes in teen-magazine fiction is the effect that the themes have on teenage girls. Do such stereotypical portrayals cause or contribute to stereotypical attitudes and behaviors? Answering this question is difficult for 3 reasons: 1) A content analysis can describe, analyze and monitor messages but cannot directly and definitively answer questions of cause and effect; 2) The prevalence of stereotypical images in the media and traditional socialization messages from other socialization forces make it difficult to isolate the effect of one medium; and 3) media researchers have never been in agreement about the power of the media — do they change attitudes and behavior and, if so, how much and under what conditions, or do they merely reinforce existing

attitudes and behavior?

Media researchers do agree that the media are not all-powerful, as suggested by the hypodermic-needle theory popular in the early 1900s, which says simply that a message sent was a message received, understood and acted upon as the sender meant it to be. Also rejected as too simplistic are such limited-effects theories as Klapper's reinforcement theory, which says the media primarily reinforce existing conditions (Severin and Tankard, 1988, p. 313).

Several researchers have attempted to reconcile media theories by looking at the interactions of media, audience and other forces. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach's dependency theory, which stresses the relationship of society, media and audience, is the result of one such attempt. The authors say the key to this theory is that audience members encounter media messages with both constructed social realities and dependencies on media resources. Social realities are the product of the processes by which society socializes people and structures their social action. Media dependency is determined by an individual's need for information, ability to get the information elsewhere and interest in the subject. The greater the media dependency, the more likely a message is to alter audience behavior in terms of cognitive, affective and/or overt behavior. Degree of dependence on media information is a key variable in understanding when and why media messages alter beliefs, feelings or behavior, the authors say. When people's social realities are adequate and messages aren't linked to dependencies, messages will have little or no alteration effects (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1982, pp. 251-253).

Researchers using dependency theory have found that people dependent on different media have different pictures of the world and that the more dependent one is on a medium, the more likely the message from that medium will have its intended effects (Severin & Tankard, 1988, p. 328).

While degree of dependency can't be determined through an analysis of magazine content, it can be argued that teenage girls are dependent on teen magazines for information about their lives. These magazines are the only medium targeted specifically to them and their popularity suggests that the magazines meet one or more needs, which increases dependency. Teenage girls are not yet secure in their social realities because they are still learning about and being socialized in the ways of the world. Being both insecure in their social realities and dependent on the medium would, according to DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, make readers of teen magazines receptive to whatever messages are sent. It would not, therefore, be out of the question to suggest that any stereotypical views held by teenage girls could in part be attributed to messages in teen magazines.

It has been shown that high-school students still stereotype occupations. In a study in which students were asked their career aspirations, certain fields emerged as exclusively female — teacher, fashion designer, clerical worker, beautician and nurse — some as exclusively male — athlete, electrician, carpenter — some as mostly male — engineer, computer technician, musician and police officer — and some as mostly female — social worker and psychologist (Michelson, 1989). Only lawyer, computer scientist, accountant and business executive were not gender-typed. In another study of elementary- through high-school-age girls, teacher and nurse were the most frequently stated career choices (Sandberg, 1987).

It has also been shown that children will reject stereotypes if shown counter-stereotypes. Schau (1979), for example, found that stories with reversed gender-role occupations were effective in reducing occupational gender-role stereotypes in grade-school children.

Counter-stereotypical media content can also be used to increase women's self confidence and independent judgment. Jennings, Geis

and Brown (1980) used television commercials with traditional or reversed roles to explore changes in women's self confidence and independent judgment. They found that the women who viewed the nontraditional commercials showed more independent judgment in follow-up testing and greater self confidence when asked to deliver a speech.

Teen magazines have a unique opportunity to shape the world of the teenage girl. There isn't an overabundance of magazines targeted to that age group so the magazines that do exist are read by hundreds of thousands of teenage girls. Changing their fiction to include more nontraditional messages, such as showing women in nontraditional occupations and teen heroines who can think for themselves, would not automatically turn teenage girls into new women (and probably would not increase their public speaking skills). It would, however, show their readers that there are options, that women are not confined to a few limited roles, and that while there are still occupations dominated by one gender or the other, there are few occupations that are the exclusive province of only half the population.

References

Bailey, M. (1969). The women's magazine short story heroine in 1957 and 1967. *Journalism Quarterly*, 47, 364-66.

Basow, S. (1986). *Gender stereotypes*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Busby, L. J. (1985). The mass media and sex role socialization. In J.R. Dominick & J.E. Fletcher (Eds.), *Broadcast research methods*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Butler, M. & Paisley, W. (1980). *Women and the mass media*. New York: Human Sciences Press.

DeFleur, M & Ball-Rokeach, S. (1982). *Theories of mass communication*. New York: Longman.

Fagot, B. (1984). Teacher and peer reactions to boys' and girls' play styles. *Sex Roles*, 11, 691-702.

Flora, C.B. (1979). Changes in women's status in women's magazine fiction: Differences by social class. *Social Problems*, 26, 558-569.

Franzwa, H.H. (1975). Female roles in women's magazine fiction, 1940-1970. In R. Unger & F. Denmark (Eds.), *Woman: Dependent of Independent Variable?* New York: Psychological Dimensions, pp. 42-53.

Friedan, B. (1963). *The feminine mystique*. New York: Dell Publications.

Jennings, J., Geis, F.L. & Brown, V. (1980). Influence of television commercials on women's self confidence and independent judgment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 38, 203-210.

Lugenbeel, B.D. (1974). Designing story patterns in *Good*

Housekeeping. Journalism Quarterly, 53, 548-550.

McRobbie, A. (1982). Jackie: An ideology of adolescent femininity. In B. Waites, T. Bennett & G. Martin (Eds.), *Popular Culture: Past and Present*. London: Croom Helm.

Michelson, R. (1989). Why does Jane read and write so well? The anomoly of women's achievement. *Sociological Inquiry*, 58, 47-63.

Peirce, K.L. (1990). A feminist theoretical perspective on the socialization of teenage girls through *Seventeen* magazine. *Sex Roles*, 23, 491-500.

Romer, N. (1981). *The sex role cycle*. New York: Feminist Press.

Roberts, N. (1980). From pumps, pearls and pleats to pants, briefcases and hardhats: Changes in the portrayal of women in advertising and fiction in *Ladies' Home Journal*, 1960-62 & 1974-76. ERIC, ED 188211.

Ruggiero, J.A. and Weston, L.C. (1985). Work options for men and women in women's magazines. *Sex Roles*, 12, 535-547.

Sadker, M. & Sadker, D. (March 1985). Sexism in the schoolroom of the '80s. *Psychology Today*, 54-57.

Sandberg, D. (1987). The influence of individual and family characteristics of girls during childhood and adolescence. *Sex Roles*, 16, 649-668.

Schau, C.G. (1979). Evaluating the use of sex-role reversed stories for changing children's stereotypes. ERIC, ED 159494.

Schau, C. G. & Scott, K.P. (1984). Impact of gender characteristics of instructional materials: An integration of the research literature. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 76. 183-193.

Schomberger, M.A. (1989). *The roles of women in magazine fiction*

as they appeared in the seventies and eighties. Unpublished master's thesis, Southwest Texas State University.

Severin, W. & Tankard, J. (1988). *Communication theories.* New York: Longman.

Signorielli, N. (1989). Television and conception about sex roles: Maintaining conventionality and the status quo. *Sex Roles*, 21, 341-360.

Weitzman, L. (1979). *Sex role socialization.* Palo Alto: Mayfield.

TABLE I

Occupation	Rating	Character
business owner	masculine	male *
judge	masculine	male *
symphony conductor	masculine	male *
usher at symphony	masculine	male *
naval officer	masculine	male *
private investigator	masculine	male *
druggist	masculine	male *
plastic surgeon/doctor	masculine	male *
dry cleaner	masculine	male *
thief	masculine	male *
security guard	masculine	male *
insurance sales	masculine	male *
taxi driver	masculine	male *
museum curator	masculine	male *
undertaker	masculine	male *
rancher/farmer	masculine	male *
lawyer	masculine	male *
builder	masculine	male *
banker	masculine	male *
grocery worker	masculine	male *
oil well foreman	masculine	male *
electrician	masculine	male *
factory worker	masculine	male *
veterinarian	masculine	male *
horse trainer	masculine	male *
band director	masculine	male *
police officer	masculine	male *
psychiatrist	masculine	both
government worker	masculine	both
nurse	feminine	female *
fortune teller	feminine	female *
secretary	feminine	female *
social worker	feminine	female *
clerical worker	feminine	female *

toll taker	neutral	male
teacher	neutral	both
restaurant worker	neutral	both
vice principal	neutral	female
art executive	neutral	female
sales person	neutral	female
graphic artist	neutral	female
performance artist	neutral	female
sculptor	neutral	female
laundromat worker	neutral	female

*stereotypical portrayal

Chi square=26.49 df=1 p< .001
(using stereotypical and nonstereotypical as categories)